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UNCLAS VATICAN 004470

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SUBJECT: VATICAN IRE AT NEW RUSSIAN "NYET" TO ITS CLERGY

1. THE VATICAN HAS SHARPLY CRITICIZED THE RECENT EXPULSION OF TWO POLISH PRIESTS FROM RUSSIA. THIS BRINGS TO FIVE THE NUMBER OF CATHOLIC CLERGY EXPELLED FROM RUSSIA THIS YEAR, INCLUDING BISHOP JERZY MAZUR OF THE SIBERIAN DIOCESE OF ST. JOSEPH. A TERSE STATEMENT ISSUED SEPTEMBER 9 BY VATICAN SPOKESMAN JOAQUIN NAVARRO-VALLS WARNED, "THIS DEVELOPMENT IS UNCLASSIFIED

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SO SERIOUS THAT ALREADY SOME PEOPLE ARE TALKING ABOUT A NEW PERSECUTION." HE SAID THE HOLY SEE HAD YET TO RECEIVE AN OFFICIAL EXPLANATION FOR THE EXPULSIONS. THE HOLY SEE'S NUNCIO IN MOSCOW, ARCHBISHOP GIORGIO ZUR, HAS PROTESTED TO THE RUSSIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY AND VOICED THE VATICAN'S CONCERN ABOUT THE PROTECTION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOMS FOR RUSSIA'S CATHOLIC MINORITY. THE HEAD OF RUSSIA'S CATHOLIC COMMUNITY, ARCHBISHOP TADEUSZ KONDRUSIEWICZ, APPEALED SEPTEMBER 12 TO RUSSIAN AND INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS TO PROTEST WHAT HE CALLED A "LARGE SCALE ANTI-CATHOLIC CAMPAIGN." THE ARCHBISHOP ALSO LAMENTED RECENT ACTS OF VANDALISM AGAINST CATHOLIC PROPERTIES.

2. REFLECTING THE HOLY SEE'S MOUNTING CONCERN WITH THE SITUATION IN RUSSIA, HEADS OF ACCREDITED MISSIONS HAVE BEEN CALLED TO A MEETING SEPTEMBER 16 DURING WHICH FOREIGN MINISTER TAURAN WILL BRIEF, AMONG OTHER THINGS, THE HOLY SEE'S POSITION ON THE PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED BY THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN RUSSIA.

3. COMMENT: THE CLERGY EXPULSIONS BEGAN AFTER THE VATICAN ELEVATED THE STATUS OF FOUR RUSSIAN CATHOLIC ECCLESIASTICAL JURISDICTIONS LAST FEBRUARY, A MOVE SEVERELY CRITICIZED BY THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH. THE FACT THAT SOME RUSSIAN CATHOLICS AND CLERGY ARE OF POLISH ORIGIN IS ALSO A FACTOR IN THE TENSION. POLISH CLERGY ARE ACCUSED BY THE ORTHODOX OF BEING ANTI-RUSSIAN. THEIR CRITICS SAY THEY CELEBRATE MASS IN POLISH, FOMENT ANTI-RUSSIAN SENTIMENTS AND DON'T LEARN THE LANGUAGE. YET THE HOLY SEE SAYS THEY SEND POLISH AND OTHER SLAVIC CLERGY TO RUSSIA BECAUSE A) THEY CAN LEARN THE LANGUAGE EASILY, B) THEY UNDERSTAND RUSSIAN CULTURE AND UNCLASSIFIED

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C) THERE AREN'T YET ENOUGH TRAINED RUSSIAN PRIESTS. THE ORTHODOX CHURCH NEVERTHELESS REGARDS CATHOLICISM AS AN ELEMENT OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION THAT BOTH FASCINATES AND DISTURBS. AT A TIME WHEN SECULAR RUSSIA IS OPENING UP MORE AND MORE TO THE WEST, THE ORTHODOX CHURCH, FOR WHICH SUCH OPENNESS IS A THREAT TO THE NATIONAL, CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITY OF RUSSIA, WILL EXERCISE ITS STILL CONSIDERABLE INFLUENCE WITH THE RUSSIAN AUTHORITIES TO PROTECT ITS POSITION. END COMMENT.

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